



December 10, 2018

Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

**Subject: WC Docket No. 18-336; CC Docket No. 92-105
N11 Code/National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018**

Dear Office of the Secretary:

The Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS) in collaboration with our members and national partners request your consideration in supporting the designation of a three-digit dialing N11 access for creating a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system.

Since 1973, AIRS has been the professional membership organization of more than 1000 organizations throughout Canada and the U.S.. of information and referral providers, with our mission as "To provide leadership and support to our membership and affiliates to advance the capacity of a Standards-driven Information and Referral industry that brings people and services together."

Major reasons and benefits of designating a three-digit dialing N11 number for a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system are:

- A national, single point of access that is free, anonymous and toll-free for all American residents is necessary to provide a public health safety net for all persons in the U.S. experiencing emotional distress and/or suicidal crisis. With approximately two-thirds of persons with diagnosable mental health problems not currently accessing mental health services, suicide rates and deaths related to substance misuse are on the rise. It is essential that we provide immediate access to help for people in crisis when, where and how they need it

- A dedicated three-digit number specific for mental health and suicidal crises would significantly reduce burdens on the 911 system, reducing unnecessary use of emergency services nationally.
- The experience of the SAMHSA's National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-8255) indicates that a national hotline number has been essential for addressing public health crisis. Lifeline call volume has increased significantly every year since its launch in 2005, serving more than 10.5 million callers. This year, the Lifeline expects to answer nearly 1.8 million calls. Because VA also utilizes the Lifeline number as a single point of access to provide a special VA-funded service for U.S. veterans and members of military since 2007, the Lifeline network and the Veterans Crisis Line together have assisted millions of veterans and service members in crisis. Creating a three-digit easy to remember dialing number nationally would greatly enhance service accessibility.
- Currently, AIRS supports over 200 **211's** in the U.S. which serve as the three-digit dialing number designated in 2000 by the Federal Communications Commission for 24/7 access to information and referrals to health and human services in the U.S.. These 211's currently cover over 94% of the U.S., and over 20% are already designated in their communities/states as suicide prevention and crisis contact centers. We believe 211's are perfectly situated to expand nationally to support this role and should be considered.

In addition, if a three-digit national phone number is secured, **then federal funding must follow**. We appreciate that this is not the responsibility of the FCC, however, there will need to be acknowledgement that increased awareness and usage will generate thousands of more calls every day. Therefore, adequate funding to support such an increase will be needed to support such a system, and **to ensure services are sustainable**.

In closing, AIRS strongly supports and recommends the creation of a national three-digit dialing N11 designation for creating a national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system.

Thank you for your consideration and please contact me directly at mcatherinerea@gmail.com for any additional information.

Sincerely,



Catherine Rea
President Elect
AIRS Board of Directors